



Windows Vista has a wealth of new features and improvements, but getting to grips with them all could take some time – unless you follow Will Head's crash course

Windows Vista is finally ready for public consumption. By the time you read this, all new PCs and notebooks will be arriving with Windows Vista pre-installed. Vista contains a number of improvements over XP, from the nuts and bolts of the operating system to the way users interact with it.

Windows Vista comes in a staggering five versions: Starter, Home Basic, Home Premium, Business and Ultimate. Vista Starter is available only in developing countries, and you shouldn't see it on computers in the UK. Vista Business lacks the photo, entertainment and Windows Media Center

options you get with Home Premium, but it has backup, networking and Remote Desktop features not found in the Home versions. Ultimate has every Vista feature. Here we've focused on Vista Home Premium, noting whether a feature will work in Basic or not. You'll also find quick tips for use in Premium, Business and Ultimate.

Trying to understand the huge number of new features in Vista is a daunting task. But fear not, over the next eight pages we take you through all the new capabilities of the operating system, showing you exactly what you can do with Vista and how to achieve the results you want.

Start menu makeover

Version Home Basic and Premium

The launch of Windows XP meant we all had to get used to a new-style Start menu. With Vista's arrival, Microsoft has moved things around again. At first glance it's not that different to XP. On the left you'll find a list of recently used applications and on the right some handy shortcuts to frequently used items such as your documents or the Control Panel.

However, hover the mouse pointer over the All Programs button at the bottom of the Start menu and you're in for a completely different experience. Gone is the large, sprawling menu that could sometimes stretch three panels deep across your desktop. Instead it has been replaced with a tidy,

collapsible menu that fills the left-hand pane of the Start menu.

To browse for the application you're looking for, click on the folder it's in. For example, click on the Microsoft Office folder to find Word, or Accessories to find the calculator. The folder expands to show its contents, in a similar way to expanding a folder in Windows Explorer.

Better still, abandon the old, XP way of opening an application. If you're still plodding your way around hierarchical menu structures, you're not using Vista to its fullest. Vista knows you have a lot of things, scattered higgledy-piggledy across your computer, and it's designed to help you sort them out. Tucked down at the

bottom left-hand corner of the Start menu is a search box. However, this is no ordinary search box. It won't slowly plough through the contents of your overstuffed hard disk while you twiddle your thumbs. Instead, it provides near-instant access to your applications.

Try this out. Type the letter m in the Search box. The Start menu changes instantly to show all the applications starting with m. If you are looking for the Media Player you'll find it in the list. In addition to programs, the search box also finds documents and internet favourites that match what you type in, so you can quickly locate things without leaving the Start menu.



Search, don't stumble

Version Home Basic and Premium

Searching for files in XP was a nightmare. If you couldn't remember where you'd put something, it was almost easier to start again than fire up the slow, clunky search facility. With Vista, however, slow searches are a thing of the past. Vista's new Instant Search feature means you can find files in seconds.

We've already covered the quick search box in the Start menu (see 'Start menu makeover', opposite). But there's a lot more to Vista Search. To make full use of its capabilities, click on the Search option in the right-hand list of items on the Start menu.

To get started, enter what you're looking for in the box in the top right-hand corner. By default the cursor will already be placed in this box. Within a couple of seconds you should see the results in the pane below. If you get too many results, filter them by clicking on E-mail, Document, Picture, Music or Other from the menu bar just above the results pane.

If it's a search you're likely to perform frequently, you can save it. This creates a virtual folder that's updated every time you access it. Perform the search as normal and then click on the Save Search button – it has a purple floppy disk for its icon – from the row of buttons above the results pane. Give it a name and click Save.

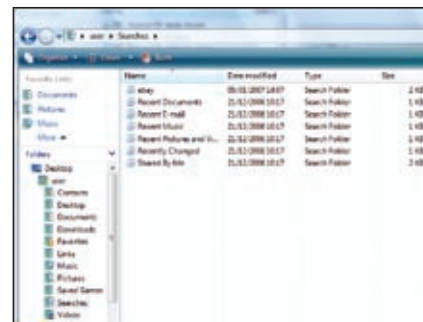
To access your saved searches at a later date, open Windows Explorer. In the left-hand pane at the top, under Favourite Links, select Searches. If you can't see Searches, click on the 'More' link at the bottom.

Vista's search facility is much faster because it constantly scans your hard disk for new or changed documents and then adds them to an index to speed up searching.

However, Vista doesn't actually index the entire disk. If it did, the index would become too big and it would take too long to compile. Instead, it assumes you'll be keeping all your files in the Documents folder, and it keeps that folder indexed automatically. However, if you like to keep your files elsewhere, you can manually add that folder to the index.

To do this, open the Indexing Options applet from the Control Panel. A faster way is to type 'index' in the Start menu quick search box. To change which folders are indexed, click Modify and then Show all locations. To see which folders are being indexed on a particular drive, click on the arrow to the left of the drive to expand its list of contents, as you would in Windows Explorer.

If there's a tick in the box to the far left, the folder is included in the search. Just as you can add specific folders, you can also remove any that you would rather not be indexed. In this case, simply remove the tick from the box. When you've finished, click OK and close the Indexing Options applet.



▲ Save frequently used searches in virtual folders

Protect your children

Version Home Basic and Premium

Microsoft has put some thought into helping parents decide what their children can and can't do when running Vista. It's possible to place restrictions on how long users can spend on the computer, block games above a certain age rating and restrict where they can go on the internet. You can even keep a log of what they've been up to on the computer.

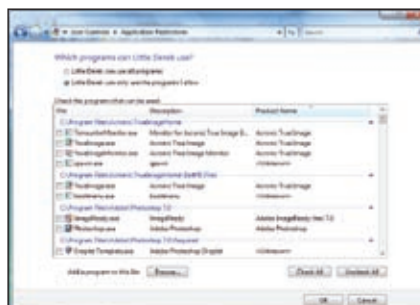
Setting up these controls is simple. All the options are listed in the Parental Controls applet in Control Panel. First you need to choose the account to which you want to apply restrictions. If you haven't set up an account for your child yet, click on the 'Create a new user account' link at the bottom of the right-hand pane and follow the instructions.

If you haven't set a password on your administrator account, Vista will prompt you to do so. It's important to do this, otherwise your kids could log in using the administrator account and remove the restrictions you've set. Once you've selected the account you want to change, in the top left-hand corner you'll see an option for Parental Controls. It's set to Off by default. Change this to On.

The next option, Activity Reporting, allows you to specify whether you want to keep a log of everything users get up to on the PC. By default it's set to On. To control which

websites a user can access, click the Windows Vista Web Filter link. If you don't want to restrict access to websites, you can turn it off by clicking Allow all websites and content.

You have two options when blocking sites. You can set up a list of allowed and restricted sites yourself or let Vista handle it for you. To block a specific site, click on the Edit the Allow and block list link. Enter the website address and click the Block button. You'll see the site listed in the Blocked websites list on the right-hand side. If you explicitly want to allow access to a certain site, enter the address and click Allow instead. In this case the site will appear on the left-hand side in the Allowed websites list. When you've



▲ Vista allows you to control exactly which applications users can run

finished adding websites, click OK to return to the previous screen. If you want to allow your child access only to sites in the Allowed websites list, tick the box next to that option.

Alternatively, you can block web content automatically. Choose High if you want to restrict all sites except those approved for children, or Medium to block mature and unrated content. You can also block file downloads. This is especially useful as virus and spyware-ridden downloads are often targeted at younger and more unsuspecting users.

To specify when your child can use the PC, click on the 'Time limits' link. You set the times they're allowed access by filling in boxes on a grid that represents the hours and days of the week. And if you're not already unpopular enough with the youngsters by now, you can set up restrictions on their game-playing. Under the Games link, you can specify whether or not they can play games and, if so, what age rating. You can also block or allow specific games in a similar manner as you can websites.

Finally, you may want to specify which applications your child can use. Click on the Allow and block specific programs link. You'll be presented with a list of all the applications installed. To allow access, simply tick the box next to the name of the program (see left).



The new interfaces: Aero and Flip 3D

Version Home Premium

While Microsoft has added some good, sensible features to Vista, it has also given the interface a polish. Rather than using the processor to do all the work, Vista will offload some of the work on your graphics processor, provided your graphics card is up to the job. To find out if your graphics card supports Vista, download the Vista Upgrade Advisor from www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/upgradeadvisor. If your graphics card isn't powerful enough, don't worry. You'll still be able to run Vista, but you won't be able to experience all the new visual effects.

Vista comes with two display schemes: Windows Vista Basic and Windows Aero. The Vista Basic scheme is similar to the Royale theme that's included with the latest version of Windows XP Media Center Edition. Aero, on the other hand, uses what is termed Glass.



▲ Aero's Glass display allows you to look through menu bars to see what's beneath

All windows in Aero are semi-opaque so, for example, you can see a blurred image of the Recycle Bin on the desktop through the menu bar at the top of a window.

If your PC can run Aero, you'll see both schemes listed in the Windows Color and Appearance section of the Personalization Control Panel applet, or by clicking on the 'Open Classic appearance properties for more color options' link. If you can see only Vista Basic, you'll need to upgrade for the Glass interface.

As well as a more pleasing display, Aero has a few tricks up its sleeve to help you find the window you want. Hover the mouse over a minimised window on the taskbar. Rather than just showing its name, Aero displays a small thumbnail of the window. If you have a lot of windows open, this will help you quickly find the one you want. The thumbnails also show



▲ Alt Tab now shows thumbnails and even full-motion video

what is going on in the window. So if you're playing a video in Media Player, its thumbnail window will also show the video playing.

As in previous Windows versions, pressing the Alt and Tab keys lets you scroll through open windows. This switcher has been spruced up in Vista and it uses the same thumbnails as the ones used on the taskbar, making it easier to find the correct window by sight.

But why use Alt, Tab when you now have Flip 3D? This new function makes switching between windows much easier. Hold down the Windows key and press the Tab key, just as you would for Alt, Tab. All open Windows will now appear in a curving line, from the top left to the bottom right of the desktop, allowing you to scroll through open windows in a 3D format. It looks great and makes switching between open windows quite exciting.



▲ Flip 3D throws your windows into 3D space to make it easy to find the one you're looking for



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Do more on the desktop with the Sidebar

Version Home Basic and Premium

If you crave up-to-date information and like to have everything at your fingertips, Windows Vista has a feature just for you: the Sidebar. As its name suggests, the Sidebar lives at the side of the screen, on the right. If it's not already running, type 'sidebar' in the Start menu search box. Once it is open, when you move the onscreen mouse pointer over the right-hand side of the screen you'll see a faint vertical line and a little toolbar appear in the top right-hand corner. Right-click on an empty area and select Properties to configure how the Sidebar appears.

The Sidebar is a home for Microsoft's new 'gadgets'. These are small, self-contained applications that display information. Standard gadgets include a clock, calendar, RSS reader, photo frame and notepad.

Adding new gadgets to the Sidebar is simple. Right-click on an empty area of the bar and choose Add Gadgets. Click on a gadget in the dialog box that appears and drag it on to the Sidebar. Alternatively, right-click on the gadget and select Add. There are more gadgets available online; click on the link in the Gadgets dialog box. When you find a gadget you want,

click on the Download to Sidebar button. Then approve the installation and the item you chose will appear on your Sidebar.

Some gadgets, such as the RSS reader, require configuration. To alter the settings, hover the mouse pointer over a gadget until a small menu showing a cross and a spanner appears to its top right. Click on the spanner icon to open the options for a specific gadget. In the case of the RSS reader you can choose whether to display news headlines from all your RSS feeds or just specific ones. To remove a gadget, click on the cross and it will disappear.

After you've placed a few gadgets on the Sidebar you may find that it's full and that any new additions push the items off the bottom of the screen. The gadgets aren't lost, though; they're just on the next page. To find them again, click on the right-pointing arrow in the top right-hand corner of the Sidebar. You can use the left and right arrows to scroll through different Sidebar pages.

If you're running a low-resolution screen, or you need extra space to display a large spreadsheet, you can easily hide the Sidebar without losing any of its settings or gadgets. To do this, right-click in an empty area on the bar and select Close Sidebar. This suggests you're shutting it down, but in fact all you're doing is minimising the Sidebar to an icon in the Notification area of the Taskbar. When you've finished, you can restore it again by right-clicking on the icon and selecting Open.



◀ The Gadget library allows you to add new items easily



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More flexible user accounts

Version Home Basic and Premium

Prior to Vista, user accounts were generally just considered a good way of keeping your documents and settings separate from those of other people using the same computer. But how you set up user accounts can dramatically affect how susceptible your PC is to virus attacks and other malware.

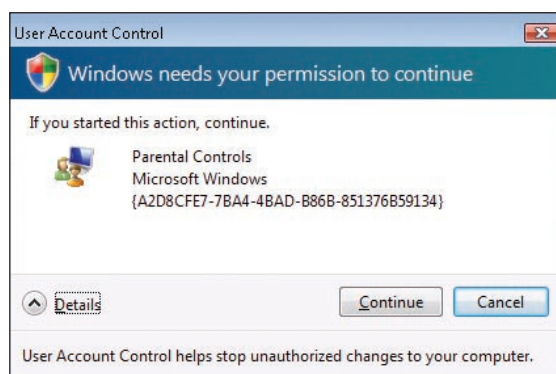
Since Windows NT, which became 2000 then XP, we've had the ability to set up user accounts that limit what that user is permitted to do. Granting a user only certain privileges on a PC limits the harm a virus can do if it installs while that user is logged on. For instance, if a user isn't allowed to alter the Registry or system files, neither can a virus they might have unwittingly let on the PC.

However, trying to use accounts with limited privileges has been at best frustrating and at worst impossible under previous versions of Windows. Vista still retains the basic idea of limited user accounts, but its approach is more workable so that it's actually usable. Like previous versions, Vista supports two user account types: Administrator and Standard user, in Vista's case.

To maintain security, all users should be given a Standard user account, which allows them to perform common tasks such as creating documents, surfing the web or running programs. Users with Standard

accounts still cannot make system-wide changes that affect other users, such as installing programs or changing security settings. Administrator accounts, which allow the owner complete control over a computer's running, should be used only for administrative tasks.

Some users, though, still need to make system changes such as installing software or performing other administrative tasks regularly. Prior to Vista, such users would use an Administrator account all the time and risk the security problems associated with that. The new User Account Control feature makes it easy for those who need to run administrative tasks to do so while logging in with a Standard user account. It's so simple, it's hard to believe that user accounts didn't work this way before. All that happens is if you're logged in on a Standard user account and want to access a Control Panel applet that requires Administrator privileges, Vista simply asks for the Administrator account password. All other programs, processes or tasks that may be running continue to do so under your Standard user account. You are not suddenly switched from a Standard user



▲ Vista's User Account Control will notify you when applications attempt to make system-wide changes

account into the Administrator account. If a user tries to perform an administrative task but doesn't know the Administrator account password, the attempt is blocked.

User Account Control is enabled by default. To take advantage of it, you should ensure all user accounts are created as Standard users. To create a new account, choose User Accounts from the Control Panel and select the 'Manage another account' link then 'Create a new account' from the next page. Enter a username and choose Standard user. For increased security, ensure there is only one Administrator account on the system and create a Standard user account for your own general use.

Media Center updated

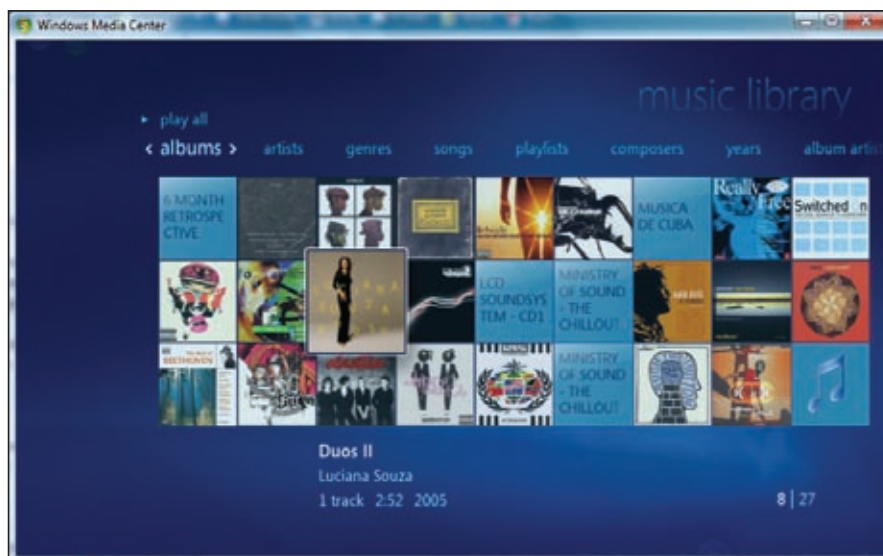
Vista Home Premium

Windows Media Center is a great way to view your favourite TV shows, video, music and photos. At the moment, to get hold of a copy you have to buy a new PC with it preinstalled. Under Vista, the requirements have been relaxed; if you're running Home Premium or Ultimate you'll find Media Center nestling in the Start menu, ready to go.

Vista Media Center retains the same aim as before: to make your media easily accessible on large-screen displays such as a television. However, it's been given a visual overhaul. The new version uses thumbnail images far more, so you can easily see at a glance what a file contains. The menu structure has also been tweaked to make the most of widescreen displays; sub-menus are now displayed horizontally across the screen.

While Windows Media Player 11 (see page 143) is a great improvement over previous versions for cataloguing and managing your audio and video files, Media Center is the ideal environment in which to enjoy them. A remote control is an excellent way to navigate Media Center from your sofa, but the mouse or arrow keys are satisfactory alternatives if you're sitting nearer the display.

To see how the interface has improved, start Media Center and use the arrow keys to scroll down to Music. Press Return. Here you can see at a glance your entire music collection, represented as thumbnails of the CD album cover, if it's available. To scroll through your collection, you use the arrow keys or mouse pointer. As you move through the albums, Windows Media will zoom each selected cover, making it larger. To play a



▲ Media Center has been tweaked to use widescreen displays more efficiently

selected album, click on it or press Return then choose Play Album.

Media Center now uses Vista's advanced graphics capabilities, so it can continue playing video clips while you're doing other things. To see how this works, start playing a video or TV programme and press the round green button in the top left-hand corner. In Windows XP Media Center, the video would have been reduced to a thumbnail in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen. Under Vista, however, the video continues to play full screen while a semi-opaque Media Center interface is overlaid so you can still see what's going on in the video.

Media Center also has limited controls to modify images as they are displayed. Navigate to Pictures + Videos then choose Picture Library. Like the music section, the photo layout has been optimised for widescreen displays.

To start a slideshow of images, click on the Play button in the bottom right-hand corner. As it plays, you may spot a photo that's in landscape mode when it should be portrait, for example. You can correct this without leaving the current slideshow by right-clicking on the image and choosing Rotate in the menu. The action only works clockwise, so you may have to click it a few times to get your image the right way round. ➡



Keep your system running smoothly

Version Home Basic and Premium

A neglected PC won't run forever. Yes, there are reports to do and you really need to finish work early tonight – but if you don't give your computer some TLC once in a while, it'll soon become uncooperative. Happily, Vista is a less demanding partner, and in certain areas it is capable of looking after its own wellbeing.

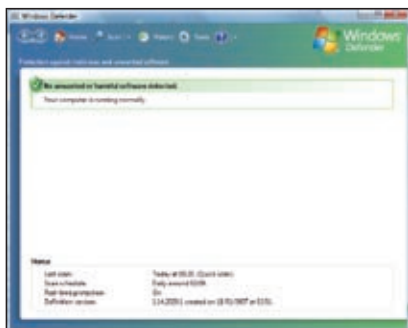
PC hard disks need to be defragmented; otherwise they slow down as you add and remove files. But how many of us remember to set up a schedule for defragmenting, or even manage a manual defrag? Vista takes the human aspect out of the equation and automatically schedules a regular defrag so you don't have to. If you're curious about what

time Vista has set aside for this activity, open a Windows Explorer window and right-click on the drive in question. Select Properties, click on the Tools tab then on Defragment Now. By default, it will be set to run to a schedule and you can find out exactly when it's next planning a defragmentation for your hard disk.

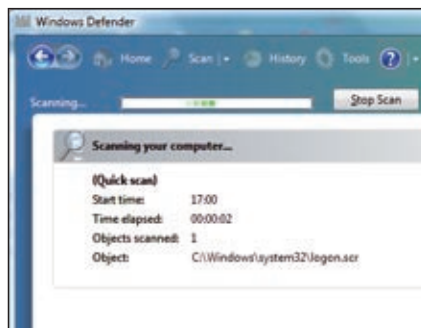
Vista also includes a copy of Microsoft's anti-spyware suite, Windows Defender. As Defender can do its work only if you give it time to prepare, it's important to ensure your schedules are in sync. Open Windows Defender from the Start menu, or just type 'defender' into the quick search box. Click on the Tools button in the menu bar and then on Options. The first

item should tell you when Defender plans to scan your PC for malicious software. If the time displayed regularly coincides with when your PC is off, it's worth trying to find a time when it can run uninterrupted. If you regularly take an hour for your lunch break, say, it may be worth scheduling it to scan your drive then.

Windows Defender targets only spyware, however. You'll need your own anti-virus application installed as well. There are many paid-for applications on the market (see our Labs on page 125). If you'd rather not pay and you're using your PC only for personal use, AVG's Anti-Virus 7.5 can be picked up for free, and is also on this month's cover disc.



▲ Windows Defender will keep your PC free from spyware



▲ To keep your system free from malware, make sure you perform regular scans



▲ Vista doesn't come with anti-virus protection, so it's important to install your own

Organise images with Windows Photo Gallery

Version Home Basic and Premium

Given the rise in digital photography, the increased capacity of media cards and huge hard disk sizes, just managing your photos can be a daunting task. Windows Photo Gallery is a new application in Vista that aims to put all your digital snaps in order, whether it's cataloguing what you've got or making your favourites look their best.

Photo Gallery takes a timeline-based approach to ordering your pictures. The main pane, on the right, groups your pictures by the date they were taken so you can quickly scan through and find the image you're looking for.

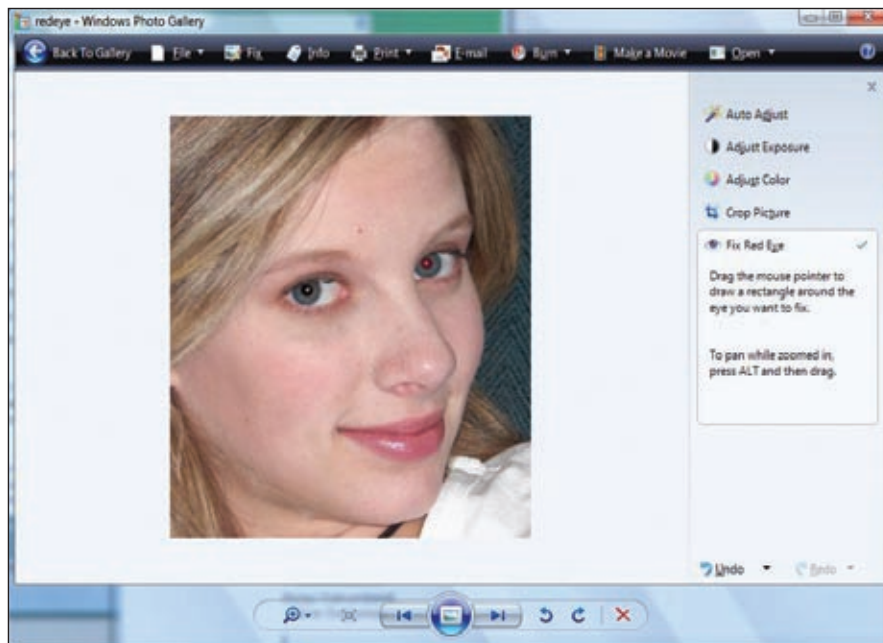
In addition to ordering your snaps by time, Photo Gallery allows you to apply tags to images for later sorting. You can tag images according to where they were taken, who's in them or what the subject matter is – it's up to you what you choose. Tagging allows you to create your own classification system on the fly and later group files that are associated with the same keyword.

Tags are also more versatile than more structured methods of organising your files, such as placing them in dedicated folders, as you can apply multiple tags to each image. You could tag one image with Daniel, France and River, another with Daniel, Rome and Architecture, and another with Kirsty, Rome and River. If you'd placed all your photos from France in one folder and those from Rome in another, you'd see at a glance just the images associated with a particular location. By using tags, you can quickly group them together by person or subject matter as well.

To add tags to your pictures, right-click on an image in the main pane (or double-click on

it). Then in the right-hand pane, click on the Add Tags link. Enter some keywords that describe the content of the photo. To speed up the process, you could add tags to multiple images at the same time – say, if all images were taken at a particular location. Just select all the images to which a tag applies and enter it in the right-hand pane as you would for a single image. Once you've got your images tagged, you can browse through them like virtual folders using the directory in the left-hand pane.

Photo Gallery also allows you to apply quick fixes to your files without having to resort to a dedicated graphics application. Select the image you want to correct and click on Fix in the menu bar. In the right-hand pane, you'll find a list of options to adjust the colour and exposure, crop and fix red eye. Just choose the fix you want to apply and modify it until you get the desired effect. Don't worry about experimenting; if you're not happy with the results, you can click the Undo button at the bottom.



▲ Photo Gallery allows you to perform quick fixes including red eye removal and cropping



Keeping files safe with Windows Shadow Copy

Version Home Premium

There's nothing worse than opening a document, editing it and clicking Save, only to realise moments later you've overwritten the only copy by mistake and there's no way to go back. Windows XP's System Restore facility has saved countless machines, but it applies only to system files. Vista goes one step further and protects other files as well.

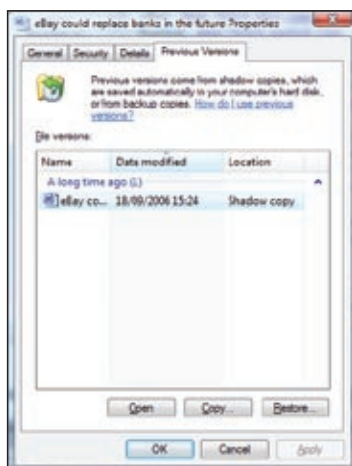
While you're busy getting on with the task in hand, Vista is keeping an eye on what you're doing, in case you make a mistake, using a new feature called Windows Shadow Copy. This feature is enabled by default as long as System Restore is switched on. To check whether you're using System Restore, open the Control Panel in Classic View and double-click on System. Click on the System Protection link on the left-hand side. You need to enter the Administrator password. Under Automatic restore points, tick the box for the relevant drive and click OK.

Shadow Copy is a bit like a time machine, allowing you to go

back and restore previous revisions of a file you've edited. Once you've realised the document you need to present to senior management in an hour has been deleted or, worse, overwritten with a shopping list for a dinner party, you can get the original file back in three clicks. Locate the file in question in Windows

Explorer and right-click on it. Choose Restore previous versions from the menu that appears. You'll probably have to wait a couple of seconds while Vista consults its memory. You'll then be presented with a list of times when the document was last saved; click back to a time when everything made sense and hit Restore. Click OK on the warning that pops up. Before you know it, your problem is solved.

This is a feature you'll hopefully never need to use. But should you ever have to use Windows Shadow Copy, even just once, you'll wonder how people ever lived without it.



▲ Shadow Copy will keep backup copies of your files so you can quickly revert to an older version of a document

All change for the Control Panel

Version Home Basic and Premium

Apart from the interface and a bit of a change to the Start menu, you may be thinking much of Vista is the same as Windows XP. If that's the case, you probably haven't had a chance to open up the Control Panel yet. This has had a drastic makeover, and some of the most commonly used applets have had their identities changed. Want to use Add or Remove Programs? It's been renamed Programs and Features. You won't find an icon for Display, either. To access this applet, you need to go to Personalization.

Vista has also added an array of new options. When you first open the Control Panel, you may be tempted to click on the Classic View link on the left-hand side so you can see the more familiar layout of icons representing the various options. If you do this, you'll see there's a lot more in there than there used to be, making it almost completely unmanageable.

When Windows XP first arrived, it brought with it a new way of looking at Control Panel called Category

view. This simplified the look of Control Panel but meant accessing an applet required an extra click, so experienced users soon reverted to Classic View. Avoid the temptation to do that in Vista, as the Category View here is a far better way of using the Control Panel. Vista's version of the Category view – the link to take you to this view is called Control Panel Home – is broken down into 11 largely logical classifications: System and Maintenance, Security, Network and Internet, Hardware and Sound, Programs, Mobile PC, User Accounts and Family Safety, Appearance and Personalization, Clock Language and Region, Ease of Access and Additional Options. Only the last is particularly vague.

To get going in Vista, stop thinking about individual Control Panel elements and start thinking about what you actually want to achieve. Additional Options mostly contains third-party additions, an area omitted from the Windows XP Category view.



◀ The Control Panel's grouping of items makes it easier to find the item you're looking for

Quick tips: Vista Business

Lock out unauthorised devices

To protect your data, Vista allows you to specify which hardware devices can be installed on your PC. You can set a policy to deny USB flash drives the system doesn't know about and, if someone plugs one in and tries to steal your files, Vista will refuse to install the device.

Just the fax

Email may be the *de facto* communication medium of the new millennium, but sometimes faxes are essential. Windows Fax and Scan allows you to capture documents from your scanner and fax them to people using your modem, so you don't have to print them out before sending them.



Network protection

There's nothing worse than keeping a nice clean network, only to have someone connect to it and infect the network with something nasty because their security isn't up to date.

With Network Access Protection, IT managers can specify requirements for clients that want to access their network. For example, you could require that a user have up-to-date anti-virus protection and security updates. If the computer isn't up to scratch, then it's blocked.

Super easy backup

In addition to traditional file-based backup procedures, Vista can also create an image-based backup of your entire PC for easy recovery. An image is basically a snapshot of your computer's hard disk, so if you need to restore your files you can be sure that everything has been preserved safely.





Quick tips: Vista Home Premium

Quick Launch quick start

The Quick Launch bar to the right of the Start button is a great time-saver for accessing frequently used applications. But under Vista there's an even faster way to use it. The first 10 applications can be launched by pressing the Windows key and the numbers 1-0 on the keyboard, so Windows-3 launches the third application, for example.

Expanded options

Right-click on a file in Windows Explorer and you'll be presented with a short list of common operations. You can bring up an expanded list of options by holding down the Shift key while right-clicking, which includes additional items such as 'Add to Quick Launch' or 'Pin to Start Menu'.

Anytime Upgrade

With so many versions of Vista available, it's hard to know if you've opted for the right one. If you're unsure about which one to go for, it might save you some cash to opt for a more basic version. Should this prove insufficient for your needs, you can easily upgrade later with Vista's Anytime Upgrade feature, and it doesn't require a second trip to the shops. The installation DVD actually contains all versions, so you just need to go online, pay the difference and then you're ready to enjoy the extra features.

Flash speed up

A downside to all Vista's flashy new features is that it's more demanding on your hardware. If you find Vista is running a little slowly, Ready Boost is a new painless upgrade that will help. Just plug in a USB flash drive and choose 'Speed up my system' from the AutoPlay menu. Vista will now use the flash drive as additional memory space, resulting in speedier operation.

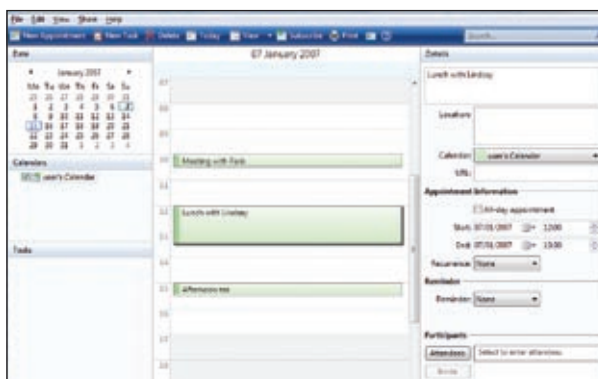


Get organised with Windows Calendar

Version Home Basic and Premium

If you find you're often in the wrong place at the wrong time, Vista can lend a hand in sorting out your private life. The new Windows Calendar provides a quick and easy way to keep track of appointments, birthdays, meetings and tasks. Open Windows Calendar from the Start menu. It will automatically open on today's date. The main interface is split into three panes. There's navigation on the left, your appointments in the middle and details on the right.

By default, the middle pane shows a single day, divided into hours. To add a new appointment, click on the relevant time and start typing. This will create a half-hour appointment with the name you just typed, but you can change the duration in the details pane on the right. The details pane allows you to enter more information about the entry you just created, such as the location, and whether or not you want a reminder.



▲ Windows Calendar makes it easy to organise your time

Windows Calendar is about more than just managing your appointments on your own PC. You can also share your calendar with others over the internet. Windows Calendar uses the standard iCalendar format, which is designed for sharing schedule information with others. To set up automatic sharing, you'll need your own webspace and you'll also need to check that your website host supports WebDAV (Web-based Distributed Authoring and Versioning). Many do, but ask if you're not sure.

To upload your calendar, select Publish from the Share menu. Give the calendar a name and enter a location, for example www.mywebsite.com/calendar. If you tick the 'Automatically publish changes made to this calendar' box, your online calendar will automatically be updated when you make changes.

If your website host doesn't support WebDAV, you can still share your calendar. To do this manually, first choose Export from the File menu to save a copy on your hard disk in .ics (iCalendar) format. You can then manually upload this file to your webspace to share it. If you use this method, though, you'll have to export and upload your calendar each time you add or edit appointments to make sure the shared version has the latest changes.

To add other people's calendars to Windows Calendar, click the Subscribe button on the menu bar. Enter the web address of the calendar you want to add, such as www.mybestfriend.com/calendar.ics. Their appointments will now appear alongside entries in your calendar.

Improved Windows Explorer

Version Home Basic and Premium

Microsoft has put a great deal of work into making the process of finding and managing your files much easier in Vista. The improved search facilities (see 'Search, don't stumble' on page 133) go some way to helping. But most of us would prefer to have a way to pick through folders ourselves to find the files we want. Windows Explorer is still available in Vista. At first glance, little seems to have changed. But dig a little deeper and you'll find some great new features.

XP introduced the Filmstrip preview option for images. This allowed you to view full-size pictures in Windows Explorer without having to open an external program just to look at your images. Vista takes this idea further with the addition of the preview pane, which works with other files as well as images.

To enable the preview pane, click on the Organize menu at the top of the Explorer Window. Choose Layout, Preview Pane. This will create a new pane to the right of Windows Explorer. Now when you select a file you can instantly see what's in it without having to open it in an application.

For a preview to appear in the pane, you need to have an application installed that can open the files in question. So, for example, you won't be able to preview a Word-formatted file if you don't have Word. There's also a rather handy Details pane at the bottom of the Explorer window. This provides an at-a-glance look at document properties, such as name, file type, date modified, size and when it was created.

When it comes to managing your files, selecting multiple items to drag and drop from folder to folder can be a pain. Under XP you had to hold down the Ctrl key and click on the files you wanted to move. Release

the Ctrl key at the wrong point and you lost your selection and had to start all over again.

In Vista you can use tick boxes instead. With these, all you need to do is tick the boxes next to the relevant files and they'll stay selected until you remove the tick. This feature isn't enabled as standard, so first you need to select Folder and Search from the Organize menu. Click on the View tab and enable 'Use check boxes to select items' near the bottom of the Advanced settings list of options.

Now when you hover over a document you'll see a tick box in the top left-hand corner of the file's icon. Tick it to select the file. When you drag and drop your files, Vista will also show you how many items you've selected so you can quickly see if you've picked up everything you wanted.



▲ Explorer's improved preview pane now supports many common document types and allows you to view an image of the selected file



More manageable Media Player

Version Home Basic and Premium

At first glance, Windows Media Player 11 doesn't look that different to its predecessor. However, there are some significant changes to help you manage your bulging media collection. While managing a small number of files in Media Player 10 was simple, it became harder to wade through them all as your media collection grew. The new version of Media Player has done away with the complicated and seemingly never-ending tree-style list of items. The left-hand pane is now kept clean and easy to navigate, with the bulk of information contained in the larger right-hand pane.

As you buy more music and add it to your library, navigating around gets harder due to the increased number of items with which you have to deal. Luckily, the wonderful Search tool that is so useful on the Start menu and in Windows Explorer comes to the rescue here, too. In under a second, you can have the right track ready to play.

To use the search tool, click in the Search box in the top right-hand corner and enter a few letters relating to the track you're looking for. Media Player updates the main pane almost instantly to show you what it's found, matching files as you type. For example, typing 'd' might return a large number of artists, albums and song, but expand it to 'dub' and the list is significantly reduced. If you've gone too far and missed what you're looking for, the new back and



▲ Media Player now makes it easy to update album art

forward buttons allow you to retrace your steps easily. The buttons are similar to those you'd find in Internet Explorer and Windows Explorer, so you can quickly jump back and forth in search of that special song.

Media Player 10 had the ability to find and download music album artwork automatically. However, if you didn't agree with the match it found, you were limited in what you could do to correct it. The new version makes it much easier to add your own. If you have a picture of the album cover, copy it to the clipboard and locate the corresponding album in your library. Right-click on the album and select Paste Album Art from the context menu.

Create your own DVD movies

Version Home Basic and Premium

Windows XP made a huge step forward in creating CD backups of your work. Instead of having to use an external (and unfamiliar) application to create CDs, you could do it directly from Windows Explorer. Vista has the same approach. However, since Windows XP was released, writable DVDs have become mainstream, and people want to create more than just reliable (but hardly exciting) data CDs.

The facilities available in Vista reflect this. However, if you just want to burn a humble data disc of your documents, Vista can still do this. Open up Windows Explorer and select the files you want to burn to disc. If you find using the Ctrl or Shift keys a difficult way to select files efficiently, see 'Improved Windows Explorer' (opposite). To start the disc-burning wizard, click on the Burn button in the menu bar at the top of the Windows Explorer window.

If you've got a large collection of photos you want to share with family or friends, instead of creating a standard data disc, you can create a video DVD that plays in domestic DVD players. First, open Windows Photo Gallery (see 'Organise images with Windows Photo Gallery' on page 138) and select the images you want to include on the disc. Click on the Burn button. You'll be presented with two options: Data Disc and Video DVD. Choose Video DVD to start Windows DVD Maker. The files are added to the project and you can see how much DVD time the project will occupy by looking at the pie chart on the bottom left-hand side of the screen. If you haven't filled the maximum 150 minutes, you can add more files by clicking on the 'Add items' button.

When you're happy with the contents of the disc, click on the Next button in the bottom right-hand corner to select a menu style. Basic DVD packages create static menus – still images with text links. Windows DVD Maker can create motion menus, similar to commercial DVDs where you see moving pictures behind the menu text rather than static images.

A wide variety of menu options are available. Use the pane on the right-hand side to scroll through them. If you want to see exactly how the final disc will look with your pictures, click on the Preview button. If you're not happy with how it looks, click on the Back button in the top left-hand corner and choose another option. When you've found and settled on a menu you like, click on the Burn button in the bottom right-hand corner, put a blank disc in the DVD writer and wait while your masterpiece is created.



▲ DVD Maker can create full-motion menus at the click of a button

Quick tips: Vista Ultimate

Keep data safe from prying eyes

BitLocker Drive Encryption not only scrambles your files so they can't be read by unauthorised users but can also let you know if someone's been tampering with your system. The feature operates seamlessly, so once it's enabled you can just use your PC as normal.

Back to the old school

If you fancy taking a break from Vista's snazzy new interface and features, you can run your previous version of Windows on Virtual PC Express. This emulates a computer in software, so you can run any old applications that don't like Vista on a separate simulated machine.

Ultimate add-ons

Everyone likes a nice surprise, and Vista Ultimate is the operating system that just keeps on giving. Ultimate Extras are downloadable add-ons available exclusively to users of Ultimate. The features they'll bring are a closely guarded secret, but every now and again a new one will be released.

Ultimate Extras were made available from 30th January, the day Vista launched. At the time of writing, Microsoft had announced the first two Extras: DreamScene and the Hold 'Em poker game.

DreamScene allows you to spice up your desktop by placing video, rather than static images, on it. It will come with example video loops included, or you can use your own instead.

Hold 'Em is a poker game that uses DirectX and Vista's graphics capability to provide smooth, animated play. **ES**

